

Stranded people

Mythical narratives about the first inhabitants of Mentawai Islands

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine the stories about the origins of the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands. My aim is to understand the perspective of the local community in seeing themselves in the particular place and space where they live in the Mentawai Islands. In my opinion, a set of narrative as a story about the origin of a group of people has a significant value for the development of local communities and their culture. A collection of narratives is an important source of information to understand the ideas of local communities in perceiving their past, especially people who do not have a written tradition. Many of these stories have not been studied thoroughly and on this occasion, I explore it in more depth.

KEYWORDS: Mentawai, oral tradition, mythical narratives, stories of origins.

INTRODUCTION¹

Different scholars had wanted to find out the origins of Mentawaians but they failed to get reliable sources of information. Accounts of the inhabitants of Mentawai Islands were first documented in 1799 by John Crisp who wrote a report about the inhabitants of Poggy (Pagai) island of Mentawai. Since then, information of different events of Mentawai has been found in written accounts as listed by Suzuki (1958), Roth (1985) and Persoon, Schefold, De Roos, and Marschall (2002). However, those accounts have not provided clear information of the origins of Mentawaians.

These written accounts show that European scholars have examined the physical appearance of Mentawaians (Duyvendak 1940; Van Beukering

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